



THE NAVAJO NATION

OFFICE OF THE PRESIDENT & VICE PRESIDENT

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CONTACT: GEORGE HARDEEN
COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR
OFFICE – 928-871-7000
CELL – 928-380-7688
georgehardeen@opvp.org

Navajo Nation, FEMA sign historic agreement to provide federal relief in times of emergency

WINDOW ROCK, Ariz. – When another inevitable natural disaster strikes the Navajo Nation, it won't be alone to respond to the emergency.

That's because the Navajo Nation now has a formal agreement with the Federal Emergency Management Agency which will assist with federal dollars to cover the costs of handling the disaster.

"What this agreement means is that now we can release federal funds to the Navajo Nation for them to recover from this series of disasters," said Tony Russell, FEMA coordinating officer for the state of New Mexico.

The Navajo Nation began its relationship with FEMA a year ago during Operation Hasktlash but formalized it last Friday when Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., and FEMA representatives signed an agreement to clear the way for federal recovery relief when the next flood, fire, microburst or devastating snowstorm occurs and a state of emergency is declared.

"It's the first of its kind to combine two states, both New Mexico and Arizona," Mr. Russell said. "It will combine with one federal point of contact to make the whole process much simpler to be able to get the funds to the people who need it."

Also signing the agreement here on Oct. 27 with the President and Mr. Russell was FEMA Arizona



FEMA representatives join Navajo Nation President Joe Shirley, Jr., First Lady Vikki Shirley. Pictured front row from left to right are Helbent Frazier, Mae-Gilene Begay, President Shirley, First Lady Vikki Shirley and Navajo Emergency Management Commissioner Selena Manychildren. Back row from left to right are Veronica Verde, Julius Pete, Jimson Joe, FEMA's Lee Rosenberg, FEMA's Tony Russel, Navajo Nation Emergency Management Incident Commander Johnny Johnson, Navajo Emergency Management Commission Chairman Herman Shorty and Philene Herrera.

coordinating officer Lee Rosenberg, who will be the first federal point of contact in another declared emergency.

"The government-to-government agreement between FEMA and the Navajo Nation paves the way for us to continue working closely together,"

Mr. Rosenberg said. "We have taken an important step toward recovery from the monsoon storms that struck the Navajo Nation."

"This is the first time that FEMA has responded to natural disasters that cross the boundaries of two states, two FEMA regions and two Joint Field Offices," Mr. Russell said. "The whole design is to give the Navajo a single point of federal contact."

The signing of the agreement allows the federal government to begin releasing funds to assist in repairing roads and other public facilities damaged by flooding. Under terms of the presidential disaster declarations, reimbursement for the Arizona portion is limited to damage occurring between July 25 and Aug. 4. In the New Mexico portion, reimbursement is available for damage between July 26 and Sept. 18.

The federal disaster declarations include Navajo Nation lands within Navajo County in Arizona and in New Mexico within Cibola, McKinley, Rio Arriba, Sandoval and Socorro counties.

"Even as big as we are, we're just one tiny speck in the world. We can't do it alone," President Shirley said. "Some of the things that happen, the damage it does when it happens, is into the hundreds of thousands of dollars."

"So we need friends all the time. And we need to be working together," the President said. "If we can pool resources, pool manpower, pool equipment at a time when a natural disaster hits, that's the way it should be. We can salve and alleviate some of the hurt that takes place at the time, and FEMA has been there for us in times past."

Herman Shorty, chairman of the Navajo Nation Emergency Management Commission, said the agreement represents acknowledgement by the federal government of the size, complexity and even sovereignty of the Navajo Nation.

"The agencies at a federal level are understanding the uniqueness of Navajo and now recognize that there is a need to provide a service much more on the one to one and I guess they're better understanding it or else we would not be affecting such an event such as this in that area, so it's a growth, it's a furtherance. It's a momentum of efficiency," Mr. Shorty said.

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